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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BUCHAREST 001644

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STATE DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/NCE WSILKWORTH

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [EFIN](#) [OVIP](#) [RO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ROMANIA REAFFIRMS STRONG CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR
CONTINUED TROOP PRESENCE IN IRAQ DESPITE FINANCIAL
CONSTRAINTS

REF: A. SECSTATE 131524

[B](#). BUCHAREST 1609

[C](#). BAGHDAD 3010

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF ROBERT S. GILCHRIST FOR REASONS
1.4 A, B AND D

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. President Traian Basescu told an interagency team led by Ambassador Richard Jones, Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Coordinator for Iraq Policy, July 21 that

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Romania is "unconditionally committed" to a continued troop presence in Iraq. Basescu highlighted the armed forces' financial burdens in light of recent massive domestic flood relief efforts and stated that additional USG financial support for defense reform might permit Romania to increase its contribution in Iraq. Though not a member of the Paris Club, Basescu confirmed that Romania has agreed to Paris Club terms and will forgive 80 percent of Iraq's debts, which total USD 2.6 billion. President Basescu also raised Romania's request to interview security detainee and Iraqi-American citizen Mohammed Munaf, who is a criminal suspect in Romania. Defense Minister Atanasiu reaffirmed the GOR's commitment in Iraq but provided insights into cost saving measures under consideration by the MOD, including possible reductions of overseas deployments in 2006. Senior MFA interlocutors also underscored the GOR's support for a continued GOR presence in Iraq, stressing the importance of a renewed UNSC mandate as well as an Iraqi government request for a Multinational Force (MNF) presence. End Summary.

President Basescu: Unconditional Commitment to Iraq

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Jones initiated the meeting with President Basescu, accompanied by State Counselor for National Security General Constantin Degeratu and State Counselor for International Relations Anca Ilinoiu, by expressing gratitude for Romania's steadfast commitment in Iraq. Ambassador Jones singled out Romania's contribution to UN force protection in Basra as particularly significant, given that an abiding international civilian presence in Iraq, such as the UN mission, remains a high priority and constitutes a bellwether for other international organizations of improved security conditions.

[1](#)3. (C) Basescu stated that the GOR faces deep budgetary problems in the wake of recent severe flooding across Romania (Ref B). He characterized the flood-affected areas as covering a "small surface but having a huge impact," with bridges, railroads and villages destroyed and thousands rendered temporarily homeless. He noted that the GOR has incurred mammoth costs operating an "air bridge" between Bucharest and flood ravaged zones. Naturally, he continued, Romania's armed forces have played a key role in providing relief and organizing cleanup and repair. So far, the Romanian military has spent about USD 60 million and anticipates spending USD 100 million on flood related activities. Flood relief costs have placed tremendous pressures on the armed forces' budget. In addition to limits imposed by fiscal constraints, Basescu said that despite the absence of "signals from the population" opposing Romania's overseas deployments, some journalists could begin to ask "Why not use our troops here?" given the urgency of the flood crisis.

[1](#)4. (C) Basescu explained that the armed forces face another "major problem" - delays in planned MOD modernization and reform this year and in 2004. "I am really disappointed that reform is not going fast enough, there are still too many conscripts," the President observed. (Note: The MOD's goal is an all-professional armed forces by 2007. End Note.) Basescu asked if it would be possible for the USG to increase support for defense reform.

[1](#)5. (C) Basescu immediately added, however, "we will not put any condition on participation in Iraq and Afghanistan if support cannot be increased." He promised that Romania will "remain an ally until the end of the mission, we won't play politically." Romania will not put a "question mark" around its participation and "will not in any event diminish participation in Afghanistan and Iraq." Nonetheless, he

continued, financial support could permit the GOR to consider increasing its contribution in Iraq. Basescu stated that, in any event, troop withdrawal by the end of 2006 is "optimistic" and "we are mentally prepared for the extension of our presence in Iraq."

16. (C) Ambassador Jones expressed appreciation for Basescu's realistic assessment of the need for a continued Multinational Force (MNF) presence beyond 2006. Both the Ambassador and team member Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, US Army CENTCOM, discussed ongoing efforts to increase the quality of Iraqi security forces, such as embedding MNF teams in Iraqi units, with the ultimate goal of enabling the Iraqis to take over the fight against terrorists and insurgents. BG Kimmitt underscored that on-the-ground conditions rather than an artificial calendar must drive MNF force contributions.

Basescu Proposes Possible Gendarme Training

17. (C) Basescu stated he had spoken with the Romanian Interior Minister Vasile Blaga regarding possible additional contributions Romania could make to strengthen Iraqi institutions. He said that Romania "could send trainers to train the gendarmerie in Iraq." BG Kimmitt described the enduring need for a well-trained Iraqi gendarmerie and outlined possible training modalities. Basescu affirmed that although Romania is a small country with "limited resources" it will remain a "solid partner" and contribute in areas where it can, such as gendarme training.

Debt Reduction Pledge

18. (C) President Basescu stated that following a recent Paris Club agreement Romania has decided to reduce its Iraq debt (which totals USD 2.6 billion) by 80 percent. He noted that Romania is not a member of the Paris Club but voluntarily complied with its debt reduction Recommendation. Ambassador Jones expressed appreciation for Romania's decision to substantially forgive its Iraqi debt, observing that among the three prongs of international support for Iraq - military, political and economic - economic assistance has been the weakest prong. Ambassador Jones noted that Romania is a good example for other creditors, especially non-Paris Club members and nations like Romania that face financial constraints.

Romanian Access to Security Detainee Munaf

19. (S) Basescu raised the subject of Iraqi-American national Mohammed Munaf, now held as a security internee by Coalition Forces in Iraq under the authority of UNSCR 1546, asserting that Romanian "prosecutors need to have a discussion with him" because of his suspected involvement in the kidnapping of three Romanian journalists earlier this year. He stated that the GOR continues to seek the approval of American authorities to meet with Munaf for a "four hour discussion." He continued that the GOR believes Munaf can provide key information about the ongoing prosecution of alleged kidnapping mastermind, Syrian-Romanian businessman Omar Hayssam, whom Basescu asserted is suspected of providing "financial resources to terrorists." Basescu promised that the GOR would "respect all procedures" during the interview and would conduct the interview in any location designated by the USG, given that he is a security detainee. He added that, pursuant to Romanian law, his lawyer would "probably like to attend" the interview. In response to a direct query from Ambassador Jones, Basescu said that the interview did not need to take place in the Romanian Embassy as a previous diplomatic note had indicated. Ambassador Jones promised to help facilitate appropriate GOR access to Munaf. Regarding Munaf's final disposition, Ambassador Jones encouraged Romania to engage in a close dialogue with Iraq. Basescu replied that Romania already has an "extremely close" dialogue with Iraq on Munaf and other issues.

Committed - But Cautious - Defense Ministry

10. (C) In a separate meeting at the MOD, Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu, accompanied by State Secretary for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Defense Policy Ion Mircea Plangu and CHOD General Eugen Badalan, began his comments by noting that the GOR has "the commitment to remain until the Iraqi armed forces can take over." Atanasiu asserted that costs related to the recent flooding compel Romania to consider either reducing its overseas deployments or seeking "cofinancing." Absent "substantial financing," Atanasiu continued, Romania "should consider reduction of its troops overseas by 300" in 2006. (Note: According to MOD statistics, about 1700 Romanian troops are currently deployed overseas, with more than 850 in Iraq and 540 in Afghanistan. End Note.)

11. (C) Atanasiu iterated that "we will maintain our forces in Iraq until the Iraqi forces can take over" but Romania must consider various options for its 2006 overseas deployments including "proportional reductions" or "equal

reductions." In the latter alternative, Romania would withdraw a total of three companies (i.e. about one hundred troops in each company) from the Western Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. Atanasiu added that the GOR is currently weighing whether to withdraw its frigate from participation in Operation Active Endeavor in Mediterranean, with a decision likely this month or in August. Atanasiu and CHOD Badalan outlined several possible cost saving measures, including overseas deployment reductions, "delay in equipment modernization," and cancellation of exercises, before concluding that the MOD will consider a "mixture of options" for cost saving. Badalan interjected that the bottom line is that the MOD must seek a solution to save the 60 million dollars it has already spent on flood relief efforts. Atanasiu explained that the GOR also faces "budgetary concerns" related to anticipated EU accession in 2007, which limit excessive deficits. BG Kimmitt encouraged the MOD and MFA to consult closely with the U.S. before making any changes in Romania's force presence overseas. He emphasized that maintaining the force protection unit for the UN at Basra is and should remain a top priority.

112. (C) The CHOD added that the MOD needs to justify its activities in a post flood environment, which means telling the Romanian people either that money earmarked for overseas deployments comes from external sources (read: donors) or the MOD is reducing its overseas commitments. The Charge noted that the USG is exploring ways to assist with flood relief.

The Centrality of a UN Mandate

113. (SBU) Following a working lunch with MFA officials, MFA Director General for Global Affairs Stelian Stoian chaired an interagency working group that discussed the GOR's continued commitment to a troop presence in Iraq. Key GOR participants were MOD Director General Claudiu Degeratu, External Intelligence Service (SIE) Director General Silviu Predoiu, Internal Intelligence Service (SRI) Colonel Mihai Munteanu, MFA NATO Division Director Mirela Maghiar, and MFA Middle East Division Deputy Director Laura Mircea.

114. (C) MFA State Secretary for Global Affairs Teodor Baconschi, the de facto number two Foreign Ministry official, joined the interagency meeting in progress and reaffirmed the GOR's commitment to a continued presence in Iraq as expressed earlier in the day by President Basescu's "message." He underscored that the GOR supports the "extension of the mandate" authorizing the presence of the MNF, as provided by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546. MFA DG Stoian stressed that a new UN mandate should be "comprehensive, so that the MNF can defend itself and the people, covering all possibilities." Stoian also asked whether the Iraqi government "is ready to request officially that the UN authorize a military presence in Iraq post-elections?" Ambassador Jones observed that Iraq recognizes that a continued MNF presence there is essential and the USG will engage in "close consultations" with the Iraqis. (Note: UNSC 1546, Articles 9 and 10, provide that the "presence of the MNF is at the request of the incoming Interim Government of Iraq and that the MNF will have the authority "to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq." Senior GOR leaders strongly seek a continued UN mandate and explicit Iraqi government request for an MNF presence. Additionally, they recognize the importance of robust ROE for MNF participants. End Note.)

Engaging Reluctant Europeans

115. (C) Baconschi asked about the possible impact on USG relations with "new" European states that have "announced their intention to withdraw," opining that Romania and Poland are the United States' "strongest" Eastern European allies in Iraq. BG Kimmitt noted that the coalition remains solid; with the exception of Spain, no other nation in the 62-member coalition has formally announced that it is concluding its activities in Iraq, although some states have reduced or modified their contribution or already carried out their pledged contribution. He continued that the leadership of Romania and Poland has been significant in maintaining the coalition's solidarity. Ambassador Jones pointed out that after nearly two and one half years the coalition remains alive and well.

116. (C) DG Stoian stressed that the GOR, an EU aspirant, now participates in the EU working group addressing the development of an EU common foreign policy. The GOR is working to "generate support" from EU countries for engagement in Iraq and "EU reluctance is not as strong as it was one year ago." Stoian cited the possible engagement of gendarme units in training Iraqi forces as one example of how the U.S. "can count on Romania to try to get more Europeans involved." Baconschi underscored these remarks by promising that the GOR will remain "proactive in the EU and seek a new climate among member states."

UN Force Protection

117. (C) During the interagency meeting, Ambassador Jones highlighted the importance of Romania's contributions to UN force protection, noting that a successful UN presence encourages the presence of other international organization. DG Stoian praised UN "experience and expertise" in preparing for Iraqi elections and observed that the UN presence boosts the electoral process' credibility. Stoian also solicited the team's views about NATO's role in Iraq. BG Kimmitt responded that NATO provides "value added" in Iraq and that the MNF and NATO complement each other's activities.

118. (C) Comment. The GOR has demonstrated steady progress on its defense modernization efforts notwithstanding Basescu's expressed concerns about the slow pace of reforms. According to a close presidential advisor, Basescu raised the topic in order to suggest a possible source of USG funding support that would, ultimately, allow the GOR to continue, possibly even increase, its impressive troop commitment in Iraq. The Romanians' worries about funding sources in the wake of this summer's flooding are well founded. Over the past several weeks, Romania has faced its most serious humanitarian crisis since the fall of communism in 1989. Humanitarian concerns aside, the financial impact has been devastating, not just in the MOD but throughout the GOR, which is cash strapped at the best of times. Against this backdrop, overseas deployments could "backfire" against the GOR as ordinary Romanians question the presence of Romanian troops overseas when their manpower, know how and equipment are needed to clean up and reconstruct in the wake of the flooding. Under these circumstances, Romania's unequivocal promise to maintain troops in Iraq, its pledge to forgive the lion's share of its Iraq debt and its willingness to help train Iraqi gendarmes even if additional funding support is not available, demonstrate the depth of its engagement to building democracy and fighting terrorism in Iraq. End Comment.

119. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNet website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest

120. (U) Ambassador Jones cleared this cable.
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